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ABSTRACT

There is a definite need to establish a framework and a set of procedures for evaluating school psychological services. Studies reported to date tend to be fairly molecular and difficult to relate to program changes. The model proposed, a model of system evaluation, has the advantage of looking at the "Gestalt," of concerning itself with ways in which the numerous interrelated goals tie in with all facets of the organization. In presenting a preliminary model, the author defines 4 basic dimensions for consideration: (1) the influencers of the basic program goals; (2) the basic program goals; (3) the program components; and (4) the outcomes. He briefly outlines each dimension, observing that the value of the model lies in its recognition and utilization of the complex interaction among these several dimensions. (TA)

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The Evaluation of School Psychological Services[1]

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The objectives of understanding and improving any educational program are inextricably related to the evaluation of that program. Unfortunately, many evaluations when they do occur are questionable due to the lack of objectivity and systematic procedures. Lambert and Hartsough (1968) point out that

> There are no established criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of school mental health programs. These problems are not unique to school mental health but characteristic of those in the general mental health field (p. 486).

The evaluation of school psychological services is no exception; few evaluations are reported in the literature and the ones reported tend to be rather weak, molecular kinds of studies.

There is a definite need to establish a framework and set of procedures for evaluating school psychological services. This is not an easy task for several basic reasons. School psychological services will vary in content and structure from one school system to another. One psychological services might stress the psychometric examination of special education children, while another might emphasize teacher consultation or a preventative mental health program. The theoretical orientation of one program might be quite psychodynamic while another might tend to be

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behavior modification oriented. The personnel will vary considerably from one program to another in terms of kinds of training, number of personnel, and the psychologist-student ratio. Organizational arrangements will also vary. In some school systems, the psychologist is attached to the superintendent's office, while in others the psychologists might work under a director of pupil personnel who in turn may be two administrative levels removed from the superintendent.

Additionally, it is recognized from the onset that programs need to vary, depending on the idiosyncrasies of the particular community, and that there is little a priori evidence to support one kind of program over another. It then follows that the evaluation process should not be biased toward a particular point of view, but should be applicable to different school psychology programs.

Considering these possible variations in school psychological services, the prospect of developing a common model to evaluate all programs may appear monumental and unfeasible.

Approaches to Program Evaluation

The literature (Howe, 1955; Kaplan and Sprunger, 1967; Lambert and Hartsough, 1968; Slotkin, 1966; ~~Seulberg~~ Schulberg and Baker, 1968; Gage and Unruh, 1969; Styles, 1965; Baker, 1965; Rucker, 1967; Lucas and Jones, 1970) on the evaluation of psychological services, mental health programs, and teaching, highlights two basic evaluation models. Schulberg and Baker (1968) in particular have elaborated on these two approaches, the goal attainment model and the system model.

The goal attainment model is probably the most popular evaluation procedure. Within the context of school psychological services, it would

be characterized by first establishing specific objectives, such as "a key objective of the program is to test children suspected of being mentally retarded." A review of records at the end of the year would produce such data as, the number of children tested, the number of tests given and the number of children out of the total tested who were judged to be mentally retarded. By comparing these data to the data of prior years, or to the data obtained in a neighboring school system, certain conclusions could be drawn pertaining to the achievement of this objective.

Contrary to its popularity, the goal attainment evaluation is quite narrow in scope, tending to evaluate specific goals in isolation from other goals and processes within the organization. The difficulties in extending the findings of a goal attainment evaluation into program change have also been discussed (Schulberg and Baker, 1968).

The system model may represent a more viable framework for the evaluation of different kinds of school psychological services, and may also lend itself more effectively to subsequent changes within the program. Goal attainment is still considered within the context of this model, but the main focus is on evaluating the program as a social unit. The system model evaluation is more concerned with the ways in which the numerous interrelated goals tie in with all of the facets of the organization, from caretaking activities, to professional personnel, to inter and intra staff relationships, to feedback mechanisms, and to the ways in which the program under scrutiny fits into the broader matrix of the parent organization.

This kind of an evaluation is certainly more elaborate, complex and time-consuming than the goal-attainment model, but its advantages

would lie in giving a clearer picture of the components of school psychological services, how they relate to the total picture of psychological services and the total educational program. Also, inconsistencies, inadequacies, and goal failures would be presented in a way that could lead to specific changes.

For example, one objective of the psychological services might be teacher consultation regarding effective classroom management. A system evaluation would attempt to assess (a) the specific nature of the teacher consultation, (b) the teacher response to the consultation, (c) the preparedness of the psychologists to engage in this kind of consultation and (d) how teacher consultation related to the overall objectives of school psychological services. The evaluation might disclose that the teachers were dissatisfied with the consultation and preferred for the psychologist to work with specific "troublemakers" outside of the classroom. But it may also be learned that the school psychologists were poorly prepared for their consultation role and that building principals were unsympathetic to this approach to service. The system evaluation then not only points out that teacher consultation has failed but the tentative basis on which it may have failed. In this instance, if teacher consultation is to continue, it should be preceded by in-service training of the staff to increase their own competency in this role; it would also be important to affect some changes in the attitudes of building principals who currently were negatively influencing teacher receptivity to the consultation.

Implementing a System Evaluation

For a system evaluation to be effective there needs to be a discrete conceptualization of school psychological services as a social system.

Also, in order for the model to be implemented as an evaluation framework, a "package" of interview and questionnaire procedures should be prepared and readily available. The existence of the model and the instrumentation would permit an individual or team to enter a school system and over a period of time to conduct an evaluation of school psychological services. The evaluation would include subsequent conferences with the school personnel involved as well as a written report. Periodic follow-ups would also be important as a means of determining if the system evaluation did actually lead to changes within school psychological services. Such an evaluation might take as little as several days or as long as a month to occur, but it is argued that the end results would justify the expenditure of time and money.

As in industry, it would be more feasible to have an outside individual or group to complete the evaluation. The likelihood of bias would be considerably reduced if the evaluation were completed by persons not currently associated with the program being evaluated. A university school psychology training program would be an ideal man-power source for the evaluation. The personnel in the training program have a background in school psychology, so they are not strangers to the parameters of an applied school psychological services. These personnel can also maintain a greater objectivity because they are not a regular employee of the school program. While this university based person may have a personal investment in promoting a certain kind of school psychological services program, the structure of the system model would help the evaluation to maintain a posture of objectivity. The advanced graduate students in a

university school psychology training program could represent a part of the man-power to visit the school system and evaluate the program. This kind of experience would be invaluable to someone who is training for a leadership role in the field of school psychology.

Development of a System Model

Some efforts have already been made in the development of a system model of school psychological services (Figure 1). The preliminary model

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Insert Figure 1 here

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defines four basic dimensions (a) the influencers of the basic program goals, (b) the basic program goals, (c) the program components, and (d) the outcomes. These four areas will be briefly outlined.

(a) Program Influencers: Four key influences of program goals have been identified, and it is recognized that they will each possess a differential stimulus value in different school systems. But any total program evaluation will have to consider the existing pupil needs in the school system, administrative expectations, teacher needs and perceptions, and of course how the professional school psychologists perceive their role and function.

(b) Basic Program Goals: Aside from, but related to the goal influencers, will be the goals themselves of the psychological services. These are expressed implicitly through the day by day functioning of the staff, and explicitly through documentation in the literature of the psychological services and the school administration.

(c) Program Components: The three nuclear program components are the staff, the professional functions; and the procedures. The staff

can be examined along the lines of professional preparation, specific skills, and kind of certification. The professional functions include the various professional activities of the staff, such as diagnostic testing, group psychometric screening, teacher consultation, research, tutorial and counselling activities. The procedures considered will be such things as the referral procedures, data processing and retrieval, and the basic office management of the psychological services.

(d) Outcomes: In relation to the various operations of the psychological services, there will be numerous outcomes. These can be conceived of quantitatively, such as number of children evaluated, number of tests given, or number of teachers offered consultation. A more qualitative assessment would look at the specific ways in which children, teachers and administrators were affected by psychological services.

There is a complex interaction among these dimensions, and it is the recognition of the interaction that underlies the concept of a system model of program evaluation. The interview-questionnaire procedures are currently being prepared, and some pilot evaluations of school psychological services are planned. It is anticipated that modification and additional development of the model and instrumentation will occur as a result of information gained through the early attempts to evaluate programs.

Conclusion

It was earlier indicated that constructive modification of any program is hinged to an assessment of the program. This would certainly seem to be the case with school psychological services, where so much divergence and confusion exists pertaining to questions of role, function and effectiveness.

The pilot effort described in this paper is an attempt to develop a viable systematic procedure, and hopefully the literature will soon evidence more of the needed activity in this area.

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Figure 1

System Model for the Evaluation of School Psychological Services